

3.15 RECREATION

This section addresses the potential for the use of recreational facilities to increase as a result of implementing the proposed Conservation Plan, leading to their deterioration, as well as the potential for decreased recreational opportunities.

3.15.1 Affected Environment

3.15.1.1 Lower Colorado River

Key recreational resources are identified by river reach, although much of the river system, including undeveloped land, is used for a variety of recreational purposes, including camping, fishing, boating, canoeing, hunting, and water-skiing.

Reach 1

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Grand Canyon National Park is located in northern Arizona. Created as a national park in 1919, it was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1979. The park encompasses 277 miles of the Colorado River and adjacent uplands and contains 1.28 million acres. The park had more than 4.4 million recreation visits in 2001 (NPS 2002).

HUALAPAI INDIAN RESERVATION

The Hualapai Reservation offers camping, fishing, hiking, and big game hunting. A tribal enterprise operates a river rafting company that offers rafting trips on the Colorado River.

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Lake Mead NRA extends along the LCR from the western border of Grand Canyon National Park to Davis Dam. The Lake Mead portion is 110 miles long, with a surface area of 274 square miles and more than 500 miles of shore. The lakes within the NRA provide boating, canoeing, kayaking, sport fishing, swimming, and water skiing opportunities; while its desert offers impressive scenery enjoyed by hikers and wildlife photographers. Three of America's four desert ecosystems; i.e., the Great Basin, the Mojave, and the Sonoran deserts, converge in the Lake Mead NRA. As a result, this seemingly barren area contains a large variety of plant and animal species. A number of campgrounds and picnic areas provide additional recreational opportunities and include Boulder Beach, Calville Bay, Echo Beach, Las Vegas Bay, and Temple Bar. The Lake Mead NRA has approximately 6 million visitor use days per year (NPS 2001).

Reach 2

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

The Lake Mead NRA extends into Reach 2. Lake Mohave, which is formed by Davis Dam, is part of this NRA. Lake Mohave is a 67-mile stretch of the Colorado River north of Bullhead City, Arizona and Laughlin, Nevada. The lake is comparatively narrow, not more than 4 miles across at its widest point. It is confined for most of its length between the steep walls of Black,

El Dorado, Painted, and Pyramid canyons. Lake Mohave provides habitat for fish and wildlife, and the area around Lake Mohave (e.g., Cottonwood Cove and Katherine Landing) and along the Colorado River below Davis Dam provides a multitude of recreational opportunities. Activities include boating, camping, exploring, fishing, photography, picnicking, swimming, and water skiing. There are also hundreds of beaches that can only be accessed by boat. Noted fish species in the area include largemouth and rainbow trout and striped bass.

Reach 3

LAUGHLIN

Laughlin, Nevada is set in a rugged mountain terrain that slopes to the banks of the Colorado River. Laughlin offers an abundance of recreational water activities, as well as gambling and nightclub entertainment. Approximately 5 million visitors visit the Laughlin area each year (Laughlin, Nevada Chamber of Commerce 2003).

BULLHEAD CITY

Bullhead City, which is located in Mohave County, features the Colorado River, miles of natural hiking, thousands of acres of public lands, the Lake Mead NRA, Arizona's Veteran Memorial, and the Colorado River Museum. More than 5 million people travel through Bullhead City annually (Desert USA 2003). Activities in the Bullhead City area include ghost town exploration, hiking, hunting, OHV use, rockhounding, and water sports on the Colorado River and Lake Mohave.

DAVIS CAMP

Located near Bullhead City, Davis Camp, a campground and day use area, has boat launching facilities, picnic areas, numerous campsites, and RV hookups. Davis Camp offers many recreational opportunities, including fishing and water sports.

NEEDLES

Needles offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, including camping, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, swimming, and other water sports.

HAVASU NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Havasu NWR covers 30 river miles (300 miles of shoreline) from Lake Havasu City, Arizona to Needles, California and includes one of the last remaining natural stretches of the LCR, which flows through the 20-mile-long Topock Gorge (USFWS 2002f). Four endangered bird species reside here: the peregrine falcon, the southern bald eagle, the southwestern willow flycatcher, and the Yuma clapper rail (USFWS 2002f). Typical activities include canoeing, fishing, boating through the scenic Topock Gorge, and hiking in the Havasu Wilderness Area. Each year, thousands of visitors explore the 4,000-acre Topock Marsh, which offers excellent canoeing, fishing, and waterbird watching. Other activities offered by the Havasu NWR include camping and hunting.

LAKE HAVASU STATE PARK

Lake Havasu, formed by Parker Dam, contains a number of coves and inlets, and is a popular spot for fishing. The waters of the lake also are used for canoeing, houseboating, jet-skiing, kayaking, sailing, speed-boating, swimming, and water-skiing. Camping and hiking also occur along the more than 400 miles of the lake's shoreline. Additional tourist opportunities include viewing the London Bridge.

BILL WILLIAMS RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Bill Williams River NWR is located along the Bill Williams River near its confluence with the LCR. The refuge offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking and bird watching (as well as other wildlife viewing), with opportunities to view Yuma clapper rails and southwestern willow flycatchers, among other species. Hunting is permitted for dove, cottontail, quail, and desert bighorn sheep. Other activities include boating and fishing.

Reach 4

PARKER STRIP RECREATION AREA

The Parker Strip Recreation Area includes backcountry byways that traverse scenic corridors providing historic, natural, prehistoric, and scenic values along an 11-mile road that travels along the Colorado River. Recreational activities include boating, camping, fishing, hiking, rock hounding, swimming, and wildlife viewing.

PALO VERDE DIVERSION DAM

There are approximately 95 miles of navigable water between the Imperial Dam below Yuma and the Palo Verde Diversion Dam above Blythe. Activities include canoeing, fishing, hunting, power boating, and other water sports.

BLYTHE

Exploring ghost towns, hiking, hunting, and OHV sports are a few of the recreational activities available in the desert around Blythe. In addition, many water sports may be enjoyed along the Colorado River.

CIBOLA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Cibola NWR, which includes Cibola Lake, is located about 15 miles south of Blythe. The largest concentration of Canada geese and sandhill cranes on the LCR winter at the refuge. Visitors to the refuge engage in canoeing, fishing, hiking through native cottonwood, mesquite and willow plant communities, hunting, photography, and wildlife observation. Over 288 species of birds have been found in the Cibola NWR, including Gambel's quail, greater sandhill cranes, many species of migratory songbirds, mourning and white-winged doves, roadrunners, snow geese and Vermilion flycatchers (USFWS 2002a). The bald eagle, southwestern willow flycatcher, and Yuma clapper rail are among the endangered birds that use Cibola NWR. Other listed species include the bonytail, desert pupfish, desert tortoise, and razorback sucker.

Reach 5

PICACHO STATE RECREATION AREA

Picacho SRA is a popular area for camping, desert exploring, river running, and sportfishing. Picacho SRA is bordered by 8 miles of the Colorado River and is approximately 24 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico boundary. The area has a group boat-in area, three individual boat-in camp areas, and large group camping areas. Bird watching and small game hunting for doves, ducks, and quail are among other recreational opportunities.

IMPERIAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Imperial NWR protects habitat for wildlife species along 30 miles of the LCR in Arizona and California, including the last unchannelized section before the river enters Mexico (USFWS 2002g). The river, and its associated backwater lakes and wetlands, are a green oasis, contrasting with the surrounding desert mountains. Recreational opportunities include canoeing, fishing, and hunting. The refuge surrounds one of the few remaining "wild" places on the Colorado River and is valued by boaters for its remote scenery. In addition, scenic drives through the Sonoran Desert landscape allow access to the lookout points and the Painted Desert Trail.

MARTINEZ LAKE

Martinez Lake, which adjoins the Imperial NWR, encompasses 300 to 500 acres and is an attraction catering to anglers, birdwatchers, boaters, fishers, hunters, nature lovers, rock hounds, sightseers, and water skiers. Martinez Lake has a large variety of birds year around that can be viewed from boats on the Colorado River as well as the many side lakes along the river.

Reach 6

BETTY'S KITCHEN

Betty's Kitchen, a 10-acre wildlife interpretive area, provides birdwatching and fishing opportunities.

MITTRY LAKE WILDLIFE AREA

Mittry Lake, within the Mittry Lake Wildlife Area, covers approximately 600 acres and has undergone rehabilitation work, including fish habitat improvement, marsh dredging, and revegetation, making it an ideal location for small game hunting and sportfishing. Major species for small game hunting include doves, quail, rabbit, raccoon, and waterfowl. Major species of fish in the lake include bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, flathead catfish, and largemouth bass. There is a 3-lane boat launch ramp for motorized boating on the lake. The area is also popular for birdwatching and nature study.

1 *Reach 7*

2 YUMA

3 The City of Yuma is located on the edge of the historic floodplain to the east of the Colorado
4 River. The area offers a number of recreational opportunities, including boating, fishing,
5 hunting, and swimming.

6 **3.15.1.2 Muddy River/Moapa Valley and Virgin River**

7 Recreational activities such as camping, boating, fishing, and hiking occur on upper Lake Mead,
8 described above. The Overton Wildlife Management Area provides opportunities for wildlife
9 viewing and photography, waterfowl and upland game bird hunting, hiking, and fishing. The
10 Overton Wildlife Management Area has an average of 5,300 annual visitor use days (NDOW
11 2001).

12 **3.15.1.3 Bill Williams River**

13 The Bill Williams River NWR is located along the Bill Williams River, as described above.
14 Alamo Lake State Park, located at the eastern end of this off-site conservation area, includes
15 fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, and camping.

16 **3.15.1.4 Lower Gila River**

17 The lower Gila River offers limited recreational opportunities, mostly in the form of wildlife
18 observation and some warm-water fishing in the area with permanent water below Dome.
19 Additionally, small game waterfowl hunting is available in the Lower Gila River area.

20 **3.15.2 Environmental Consequences**

21 ***Significance Criteria***

22 The project would result in a significant impact if it would result in any of the following:

- 23 • increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational
24 facilities such that substantial deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
25 or
- 26 • cause the direct loss or substantial physical degradation of either public recreation uses
27 or public recreational facilities resulting in decreased recreational opportunities, such as
28 sport fishing, bird watching, or waterfowl hunting.

29 **3.15.2.1 Alternative 1: Proposed Conservation Plan**

30 ***Impacts***

31 Established conservation areas would be located on agricultural or undeveloped land owned by
32 public agencies, Indian tribes, or private owners. Access to habitat conservation sites would be
33 controlled in order to protect the covered species and their habitats. Developed and heavily
34 used recreational areas would not be suitable for conservation area establishment and thus

would not be directly affected by the proposed action. The conversion of agricultural land to conservation areas would not adversely affect recreational resources, because this land is generally not used for recreational purposes and is not accessible to the public. Water-based recreation generally would not be affected by the proposed action. As described in section 3.9, Hydrology, the relatively minor amount of water required to irrigate vegetation in conservation areas would not lower the water surface elevation of the LCR, and thus would not affect the operation of marinas, other boating facilities, or navigation in the river. Additionally, the proposed action would not restrict use of boating areas.

Impact REC-1. The implementation of certain conservation measures could result in the loss of recreational opportunities. The conversion of undeveloped land to conservation areas could result in the loss of some recreational opportunities, such as camping, fishing, and access to the LCR. This impact would be *less than significant* because a relatively small area would be affected in relationship to the total area available (the planning area contains approximately 126,000 acres of woody riparian vegetation and a maximum of 8,132 acres of conservation areas would be established), and the displacement of a limited amount of recreational uses to other areas would not result in the degradation of these areas. Limited fishing opportunities may be lost if backwaters were established in areas already used by the public for this purpose. Again, only a small area would be affected (360 acres out of 7,911 acres of open water [GEO/Graphics 2000]); thus, this impact would be *less than significant*.

The implementation of certain species-specific conservation measures also could result in the loss of access to recreational uses. Specifically, measures for the desert tortoise and flat-tailed horned lizard (DETO1 and FTHL1) include acquiring and protecting 230 acres of existing unprotected habitat, and measures for the lowland leopard frog include protecting existing unprotected habitat (LLFR2). To the extent that the protected habitat for these species was on lands used for public recreational purposes, access would be lost. Since the amount of recreational area that could be removed from public use is small in comparison to the area available (approximately 423,500 acres within the planning area are in open space or used for recreational purposes), the impact would be *less than significant*.

Population enhancement measures that could be implemented include controlling piscivorous fish in established backwaters prior to their use as grow-out facilities. This impact would be localized, would have a minor impact on overall fish populations, and would occur in conservation areas that would not be accessible to the public. The impact to fishing would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

Residual Impacts

Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

3.15.2.2 *Alternative 2: No Action Alternative*

Impacts

Under the no action alternative, it is likely that conservation measures similar to those included in the proposed action would be implemented since compliance with the ESA still would be required for the covered actions, although some conservation could occur in the off-site conservation areas (as described in section 3.15.2.4 below), as well as along the LCR. **Impact REC-1** applies to this alternative. The same type of *less than significant* impacts would occur as described for the proposed action, but the overall magnitude would be lessened since a smaller amount of conservation area would be established.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

Residual Impacts

Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

3.15.2.3 *Alternative 3: Listed Species Only*

Impacts

Impact REC-1 applies to this alternative. A smaller amount of conservation area would be developed than under the proposed action. Therefore, the same types of *less than significant* impacts would occur as described for the proposed action, but the overall magnitude would be lessened since a smaller area would be affected.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

Residual Impacts

Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

3.15.2.4 *Alternative 4: Off-Site Conservation*

Impacts

Impact REC-1 applies to this alternative. The difference between this alternative and the proposed action is that most conservation measures would be implemented at different locations (along the Muddy/Virgin, Bill Williams, and lower Gila rivers). The conservation measures directly related to fish, including backwater creation, would be implemented in the planning area, as described for the proposed action.

3.15 Recreation

1 *Mitigation Measures*

2 No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

3 *Residual Impacts*

4 Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to
5 reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.